



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

DIRK KEMPTHORNE – Governor
KARL B. KURTZ – Director

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
450 West State Street, 10th Floor
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, ID 83720-0036
PHONE 208-334-5625
FAX 208-334-5926

NEWS RELEASE

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Ross Mason
(208) 334-0693

CANYON COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$179 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

Last year, Canyon County residents and businesses received \$179 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 152,000 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Canyon County ranks number 6 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$1,182 for every man, woman and child residing in Canyon County. This includes citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department. The statewide average is \$839 per capita.

The Department distributed \$1.15 billion in Idaho communities in 2004. These funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, foster care and a variety of other assistance programs.

"This is an investment for all Canyon County residents," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "These are tax dollars put to good use because they are used to help people become healthy and productive. This money goes go to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment for adults and adolescents, improvements and operations at local hospitals, and dozens of other badly needed services."

"This is as much about sustaining communities as it is investing," adds Kurtz. "By providing programs that support people, we are helping communities and their residents build the endurance and strength they need to remain vital. Everyone profits from this investment, not just those who use Department programs. This isn't just me pounding my chest. That's what community leaders tell us."

Last year, the Department's Medicaid Division spent nearly \$149 million on health care for residents of the county — \$11 million more than in 2003. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Vic's Family Pharmacy in Nampa. "A large amount of our business is Medicaid," says store owner Vic Allen. "It allows us to hire pharmacy techs and more pharmacists. This really helps when you're doing the kind of business we are. We are able to specialize on services (to people) that require more time."

The story is much the same at Mercy Medical Center. "Those DSH (disproportionate share) payments are tremendously important to us," says Chief Financial Officer Lanny Checketts. They make a big difference because of the high amount of Medicaid and charity care we provide. It helps us make up for that."

Last year, Canyon County hospitals received more than \$1.8 million in additional payments called Disproportionate Share because the hospitals have a larger share of Medicaid clients than the average hospital. That money can be used for any hospital purpose, so it has the potential of providing service for any client, not just Medicaid clients. The money is in addition to payment for regular services to Medicaid clients. Two hospitals in Canyon County, Mercy Medical and West Valley Medical Center, received more than \$11 million for inpatient and outpatient care bringing the total Medicaid investment in Canyon County hospitals to nearly \$12.9 million in 2004.

Canyon County benefits from Idaho State School and Hospital in Nampa. The Department-run facility spent \$20.5 million in 2004 to house and care for Idaho residents with severe disabilities and mental illness. "Much of those dollars stay in the county," says Kurtz. "The facility not only gives quality treatment and care to patients, but provides good paying jobs that support the county's tax base."

Canyon County residents received \$15.9 million in Food Stamps — \$4 million more and an additional 2,500 clients over that of 2003. Local grocers took in \$11.4 million of the total, including Paul's Markets in Nampa and Caldwell, which redeemed \$1,364,000. Owner Stan Zatica says these dollars are very important. His eight stores employ 500 people.

"A lot of times when the Food Stamp cards are replenished at the first of the month, we run more hours and hire more people because we know the overall business will be increased," Zatica says.

What would happen if Food Stamp dollars weren't there? "Basically, you would cut overhead," he says, "and there would be less people working for you. The trickle-down effect would hurt everything."

Department spending helps people, and it has an upside for business, according to Idaho economist John Church. “This is not lost money. The spending is an investment. It goes back into the economy. If an employer came to town and spent this much money we would be elated. People need to remember that a big chunk of this is federal money which is a huge return on our taxes. This comes back and helps stimulate the economy and it helps people.”

Kurtz says, “Not only is the Department money a human investment, but it creates jobs and maintains healthy businesses. These dollars recycle numerous times in each community and help us keep the high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho. This is a wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community. The dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe neighborhoods.”

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(**Editors:** Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director Randy Woods at 455-7102 for more information.)

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<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**